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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Obama Clinton,  
U.S.-Economic, Iraq, Venezuela, Kosovo, France-UK, Disarmament

\*1. Lead Stories Summary

Editorials focused on new data protection laws, the future of Opel, and the "Family Report 2009," presented by the Ministry for Family Affairs. ZDF-TV's early evening newscast Heute and ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau opened with reports that the government would adopt new, tougher data privacy laws only during the next term.

\*2. (Afghanistan) Holbrooke Trip

Die Welt (2/14) argued: "With sophisticated logistics and high precision, the fanatic religious warriors are today again able to launch considerable strikes against international forces in Afghanistan. But the comeback of the Taliban requires a base among the people. It is the cardinal mistake of the West in the Hindu Kush that it has never conquered this base. To the extent that Iraq gains stability through wise tactics and a massive increase of allied forces, Afghanistan is about to be lost. NATO and the United States have recognized this risk and are trying to vehemently counter this development with more forces and modified tactics. And it will be more important than ever that the Afghans really feel an improvement of their economic situation and that they witness peace and security. It is all or nothing in Afghanistan and time is running out."

According to Frankfurter Allgemeine (2/16), "Richard Holbrooke wants to 'listen and learn' during his first trip to the region. At least that is what he said. But even though he had to tell the Afghan president something, he could not do so in public. The democratically legitimized Afghan president, who wants to be re-elected in August, cannot easily be politically damaged, even though he is responsible for the fact that his government does not reach the people, while corruption and drug trafficking are thriving. Every one knows what they have in him, but not who or what would come after him."

\*3. (Pakistan) Re-Introduction of Sharia

Sueddeutsche judged: "The Taliban refer to an Islam which they themselves have perverted, and now the self-appointed religious warriors will have their way in the Pakistani Swat valley. Obviously, the extremists have become so strong that the Pakistani

government does not see any other way out but to make far-reaching concessions." The daily also opined: "There will be no peace in the region for the foreseeable future if the Taliban are not integrated into talks. But they need to be weakened first, and the people in the affected region must also start to get the feeling that their government, which is supported by the West, can guarantee security and offer an alternative. But now it is making a concession from a position of weakness. This is a bad signal."

According to Frankfurter Allgemeine, "the provincial government in Peshawar has now made peace with the Taliban and allowed them to introduce the Sharia. Similar agreements in South and North Warzirstan (in 2004 and 2006) have only resulted in the fact that the radicals were able to consolidate their position there even more."

#### \*4. (U.S.) Obama Team

Sueddeutsche (2/14) judged: "Barack Obama must now seek a Commerce Secretary. This is a debacle. The chain of Obama's personnel policy missteps and the circumstances surrounding Gregg's withdrawal give the affair greater weight than previously might have been assumed. Obama's [reputation] has now been damaged...primarily because the Republicans are gloomily determined to pursue a fundamentalist opposition course. Obama must now try to implement his policy with the Democrats. That is what the Americans elected him for. They were simply fed up with the Republicans."

Frankfurter Allgemeine (2/14) had this to say: "Judd Gregg deserves recognition because he does not want to give up his views in exchange for a job as secretary. But Gregg must accept the reproach of not having realized this early enough. Nothing has changed with respect to Obama's economic policy course over the past few weeks. Thus the impression is intensifying that the president does not have the right touch for selecting important aides."

Financial Times Deutschland (2/16) noted: "Obama's attempt to lure the opposition can be considered a failure. This is all the more so because of Commerce Secretary-designate Judd Gregg's withdrawal followed like a slap into the face after the agreement [on the economic stimulus package] in Congress. In another respect, the new Washington Obama promised in the election campaign, looks like the old one. He had promised greater transparency, an open information policy and a limit of the influence of lobby groups on the White House. But during this first news conference, he read the names of the journalists, who should get the chance for a question, from a piece of paper."

#### \*5. (U.S.-Asia) Clinton Trip

According to Frankfurter Allgemeine (2/16), "Hillary Clinton struck the right tone. Unless an intolerable situation arises, Washington should pursue a policy of dtente. At issue is no longer [North Korea's] nuclear program. Kim Jong-il is keeping a tight hold on the reins again, but his days are numbered anyway. The real crisis will come after the change of regime. The question could quickly arise as to who has greater influence on the peninsula. China is seeking evidence that Northern Korea has always been part of its sphere. After a reunification there would be totally new possibilities. America must keep this in mind, too."

Regional daily N|rnberger Zeitung (2/17) had this to say: "In Beijing and Tokyo, the governments see the canvassing of the U.S. government with scepticism rather than delight. They assume that they will have to throw even more money after what has already disappeared down the dark hole of Wall Street - with the vague prospect for more political influence in return. That is why Europe should take note of the U.S. change of course with a relaxed mood. Maybe this will increase its chance to develop its own independent political and economic visions."

#### \*6. (U.S.) Economic Package

According to Tagesspiegel am Sonntag, "this was not an excellent week for Barack Obama...and the half-life of victories in U.S. politics has become eerily short. But the pace (for adopting the stimulus) will come back to haunt the Obama administration. Protectionists were able to include formulations that are tantamount

to excluding international companies from economic assistance. Hopes for a bipartisan coalition have also been shaken. And because of the concessions to the three Republican dissenters, Democratic lawmakers are now refusing to support the package. But in the long run, only one thing is important: Will America's economy get back on its feet again? Only then will Obama remain the winner."

\*7. (Iraq) Aftermath Of War

Tagesspiegel (2/14) editorialized: "The ease with which President bama is able to direct the attention of the world to Afghanistan shows how far Iraq has come. And the most recent suicide attack, which killed 30 people, is striking because it has been the bloodiest one in one year. It may be possible that now that a new U.S. president is in office, he will assert a more distanced, cooler view on Iraq. It is more useful to analyze successes and failures than to think in categories of victory and defeat."

\*8. (Venezuela) Chavez

"Chvez Wants To Govern Until 2019 - For The Time Being," Frankfurter Allgemeine reported that "the referendum on the amendment of five articles of the country's constitution has now removed all obstacles for Chvez to run for re-election as often as he likes."

Sueddeutsche noted that "Chavez's policy will cause weariness. Venezuela remains divided between friend and foe and will rush from one vote to the next. In the long run, no country will be able to withstand this stress. Chvez's challengers can only try to use reasonable arguments to present a serious candidate for the presidential elections in 2012. Strikes and attempts to oust him will be of no use. Nowhere in the region has an unlimited time to govern stood the test. Hugo Chvez can only be defeated in elections."

Berliner Zeitung judged: "This victory can be easily explained. It is Chvez's historic merit that he tackled the social problems of the country: poverty and malnutrition, bad schools and a disastrous healthcare system. All this was not an issue before Chvez. Backed by the oil price bonanza of the past years, Chvez invested a lot of money in the social welfare system and more than half of the Venezuelans thanked him with veneration, loyalty, and votes."

In the view of Die Welt, "One should not make the mistake of underestimating Hugo Chvez. Many did this, and he took advantage of it. Chvez is striving to succeed Fidel Castro and is already acting as the de-facto leader of the Latin American left, because he finances and supports them everywhere, in Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Ecuador. It is true that moderate Social Democrats pursue a different policy, but no one dares to start an argument with Chvez. Probably cowardice and fear play a role: those who start an argument with him have problems."

\*9. (Kosovo) Anniversary of Independence

Under the headline: "The Barbed Wire Will Be Removed," Frankfurter Rundschau reported that "the feared unrest between Albanians and Serbs has not taken place, but everyday life has not become easier. Kosovo became independent one year ago, but nothing has changed either for the better or to the worse."

Sueddeutsche wrote under the headline: "One Land, Two Nations" that the rift between Serbs and Albanians continues to exist - since independence, there have been no official contacts. For Europe, still struggling with the financial crisis, Kosovo is currently not priority. Still, everyone should be aware that the current situation is far away from being called 'ideal.' As long as Serbia does not cooperate, it will be impossible to implement the constitution of the state, which means that there will be no stability."

Regional daily Kieler Nachrichten argued: "Fifty-four countries have recognized the tiny state, and the U.S. president sent a telegram congratulating Kosovo. But this cannot obscure the fact that Kosovo is still unable to stand on its own feet. In this situation, Europe has the duty to help, but in Europe [the governments] would prefer to forget that all sides looked away when the situation in the

Balkans escalated. Even at that time, everyone knew that Kosovo was a special case...but all hoped secretly that the problem would resolve on its own. It did not, and that is why we are still carrying the problem around--in an increasingly listless way."

\*10. (France-UK) Collision Of Submarines

"If it were not so worrying, we could crack jokes about the collision of two submarines," Frankfurter Rundschau wrote and added: "but the laughter gets stuck in our throats when we think of the nuclear engine and the nuclear missiles aboard. Then we have difficulty believing in the French and British statements that there has been no time any danger either for the crews or the environment. Much too often have governments hushed up facts or even lied in connection with nuclear accidents."

Regional daily Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung observed: "It is really ludicrous that submarines equipped with nuclear missiles, can collide like two cars on a supermarket parking lot. But apart from the collision, uncertainty remains whether the governments in London and Paris have really told the truth. Their previous information policy was very meagre. Details are coming to the fore only little by little. This is stirring up suspicion, because it must be feared that information about a real disaster could come very late and be incomplete. That is why full information on the most recent case is all the more important."

Regional daily Schwdbische Zeitung of Oberndorf commented: "The Atlantic Ocean is so large and two tiny submarines are unable to pass each other. Somewhere in the dark, the two subs must have collided, but it remains a secret where. At the same time, the governments in London and Paris are trying to appease the public. The citizens, however, should not hope for truthful information. This is all the more the case because this incident should be highly embarrassing for the both governments."

\*11. (Disarmament) New Talks

In the view of Berliner Zeitung, there is enormous time pressure to talk about strategic, offensive nuclear weapons. The START I Treaty expires on December 5, and, in 2010, a review of the Non-Proliferation Treaty is in the offing. If both powers are really interested in strengthening the NPT regime, they must set an example: Washington should finally ratify the treaty and Moscow must exert effective pressure on its economic partner in Iran.... If countries everywhere again talk about disarmament, then this would be good, but the world is no longer a bipolar one. There will be progress only if there is a Russian-U.S. dialogue and if new powers are also included in such talks. But these countries are difficult actors. For them a global balance is by far not as important as efforts to keep their neighbors at bay."